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AUTHOR Peters, Richard O.
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ABSTRACT

An environmental education program that combines the social studies curriculum, community interaction, and the study of environment is described. Since man and nature live in a complex, continuous, and inseparable partnership, every environmental program should stress the interrelationships that exist between man and nature. Several ways by which students can be aided in developing perceptions of the interdependence of man and his environment are described including field trips, nature walks, guest speakers, weekend day trips, and overnight camping trips. Commercially available audiovisual materials and books that use this approach to environmental education are also suggested. (Author/DE)

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The Community, The Social Studies and Student Environmental Awareness

Richard O. Peters, Ed.D.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Peters is currently Director of an Experimental Schools Program (ESP) project in northern New Hampshire. This ESP project is one of ten such projects funded by the National Institute of Education, Washington, DC, and is charged with curriculum development within a rural school system.

Dr. Peters has authored several articles related to environmental education and has recently been published by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in their How To Do It series; "How To Teach About Human Beings and Their Environment".

Dr. Peters has several years of classroom teaching experience in both environmental education and the social studies. He has undertaken doctoral level studies in Social Studies Education at The Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Dr. Peters is a past member of the NCSS Instructional Media Advisory Committee and is currently a member of the NCSS Curriculum Advisory Committee.

Dr. Peters holds membership in Delta Tau Kappa (Florida State University) and Alpha Kappa Delta (University of Southern California).

"Man interacts with both natural and social environmental phenomena on a day-to-day basis. Interaction alone is not enough, if we are to intelligently conserve, manage, and protect our natural and human resources. An introduction to- and awareness of the natural surroundings provides a basis for direct human interaction with environmental phenomena and enhances leisure-time activities and recreation".[1]

The student is part of the school and the school is part of the community. Thus because the student lives within the total community, the student and that community are inseparable. There occurs a continuous interaction between the student (the individual) and the total life space environment.

Within that life space environment[2] the student encounters human, natural and social elements which directly and indirectly effect his daily life; his present and his future. There is no escaping the effects of life space environment on the individual. To move from one locale to another; that is, from one geographical location to another, means only that the individual is to be effected by new life space elements; elements which both comprise and reflect the character and construct of the new environment.

Environmental Education

In today's education circles a great emphasis is being placed on environmental education. It is believed that students must be made aware of the current plignt of our natural environment - if any corrective measures are to be taken for now and in the future - in order to save our environment, our world, and ourselves.

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[1] Richard Peters, "New Hampshire (EE) Program," Environmental Education Report, April 1976, pg. 9.

[2] life space environment: that geographical area - comprised of man-made and natural elements (phenomena - in which an individual exists and interacts at any given point-in-time or space).

Since the late 1960's, an effort has been made to affect the awareness, the attitudes, the behavior, and the values of students regarding the importance of protecting natural environments. At a very early age, students are treated to field trips and nature walks - in order to expose them to their surroundings and to provide them opportunities to interact with their surroundings. It is felt that if students gain an appreciation of nature (via exposure activities) that they will comprehend the need to safeguard its existence and to guarantee its future.

It is the opinion of this author that environmental education can be, is in fact, more than student exposure to- and interaction with nature. EE should be perceived as encompassing the total character - of the community - and attempts should be made to provide student exposure to human and social - as well as natural-environmental phenomena. After all, the most valuable resource that MAN possesses is his fellows. In any given community the most important element is MAN himself. For without humans (and their individual as well as collective talents), social communities would not exist or prosper. In turn, without human success in meeting basic needs and solving basic problems nature itself would be (and is) seriously effected.

EE programs should point out and stress, in the minds of students, the interrelationships that exist between MAN and nature in any given setting. MAN and nature live in a complex, continuous, and inseparable partnership!

Whereas MAN first appeared on Earth defenseless against - and subservant to Nature, over the aeons of time he has developed and utilized his intellegence and skills - until he reached the point at which time MAN became a manipulator of nature and her settings.

Students must realize, all mankind must realize, that neither MAN nor Nature can be totally dominant over the other at all times. Because MAN and Nature continue to exist and prosper in a collective partnership - for one to become totally dominant might mean the decline and elimination of the other. Thus, this collective partnership faces continual threats to its existence from both MAN and Nature. Both partners possess means by which they can ward off danger and overcome imbalance. Collectively, these partners can stabilize their positions and can prosper in a state of harmony and congruency.

Enter The Social Studies

The Social Studies are MAN. The several disciplines are written about MAN - by MAN. Be it anthropology, history, geography, government, or sociology, each of these recorded areas of study chronicles MAN's struggle for betterment and highlights his desire to excell.

The social studies classroom is life itself; the life of the people which is found only within life space environments. It is the totality of the community of living things that is the true textbook of the social studies.

Because the Social Studies are about MAN, they should be concerned with MAN - and his relationship(s) with other humans, social structures, and natural environments.

Thus, we have the tie between the Social Studies and environmental education - MAN!

If students are to better understand themselves and their world (whether it be near or far away) then they must begin by understanding both the interrelationships and interdependence which exists between human/social resources and nature. For what is MAN without fresh air and clean water? What is Nature without MAN's determination to protect these life giving and life sustaining quantities? What, in short, is the purpose (the grand design) of life on Earth if MAN and Nature cannot live in a state of coexistance?

The Social Studies broaden MAN's perspective of himself and environmental education provides the vehicle by which MAN better understands his role in life by exposing him to- and making him aware of his interdependence with the total life space environment(s).

Environmental Education and the Social Studies

There are several ways by which students can be aided in developing perceptions of the interdependence of MAN and his environments.

As stated earlier in this discourse, the community is the social studies textbook; the basis for student learning. Environmental education is the way by which students can be taken out into that living textbook and allowed to explore and learn.

1. SEA lessons. Student Environmental Awareness Lessons can be conducted both in the classroom or in the field.

SEA lessons 'set the stage' by providing opportunities for student exposure to the life space environment and to the individual and unique elements[3] which, when comprised, make up that environment.

2. Field trips. Excursions which provide opportunities for students to be taken out of the classroom - on well organized and planned learning experiences into both natural and social environments of the community at-large or into selected portions of that total area. Field trips consist of three separate, but interrelated parts; pre-planning, the actual excursion, and post-trip follow-up.
3. Nature walks. Students can be exposed to a particular segment of the total life-space environment either on the school grounds or far removed from the classroom.
4. Guest speakers. Often there are environmental locations, people, processes and resources which are not readily accessible to students. Community resource people visit classrooms.
5. Weekend Daytrips and Overnights. Opportunities for students to participate in hiking/camping trips into more-remote sections of the life space environment. These activities too include pre-planning, the actual activity, and post-activity follow-up.

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[3] elements: those natural and man-made components of a given life space environment which individually have character and nature - and which when combined, constitute that environment (e.g., bridges, roads, mountains, rivers, trees).

Materials

The keys to environmental education/social studies integration are:

1. accessibility of life space phenomena (elements) by students.
2. teacher initiative in planning/using accessible life space phenomena (elements).
3. the instructional activities in which students are engaged.
4. a state of proximity congruency; that is, a conscious effort on the part of a teacher to bring students and life space elements together - for purposes of interaction and learning.
5. instructional materials; those artifacts which compliment student learning and which provide for/enrich both direct and vicarious experiences.

Today there is a plethora of environmental education and social studies materials which can be used by teachers - for purposes of integrating studies and enriching student learning experiences.

An Introduction to Ecology: Six Basic Systems

a. Streams and Ponds
b. Lowland Forest
c. Seashore
d. Grasslands
e. Marshes
f. Upland Forest (Eyegate Filmstrips)

Aggradation - Degradation (Eyegate Filmstrips/Records)

Ecology: Understanding The Crisis (Encyclopaedia Britannica Filmstrips/Records)

Investigations In Ecology - a series of activity cards

(Charles Merrill Publishers)

Living On Man's Earth

a. Living in our Community
b. In Many Communities
c. At Work in the City
d. At Work on the Farm
e. At Home in the City and on the Farm

(Encyclopaedia Britannica Filmstrips)

Natural Resources Concept Pack Units 1 and 2 - posters

(Milton Bradley)

Natural Resources and You

a. What we Need
b. Where we Find It
c. How We Get It

(Encyclopaedia Britannica Filmstrips)

Urban Ecology: Six Microsystems

a. A Paved School Yard
b. A Park
c. A Grass Yard
d. A Park Pond
e. A Vacant Lot
f. A Construction Site

(Eyegate Filmstrips)

Using Natural Resources

a. The Supply
b. The Demand
c. Balancing the Supply and Demand

(Encyclopaedia Britannica Filmstrips)

Working Together on Man's Earth

a. Helping One Another
b. Farmers Help People
c. Cities Help People
d. A Mining Community
e. Two Different Climates
f. Two Different Communities

(Encyclopaedia Britannica Filmstrips)